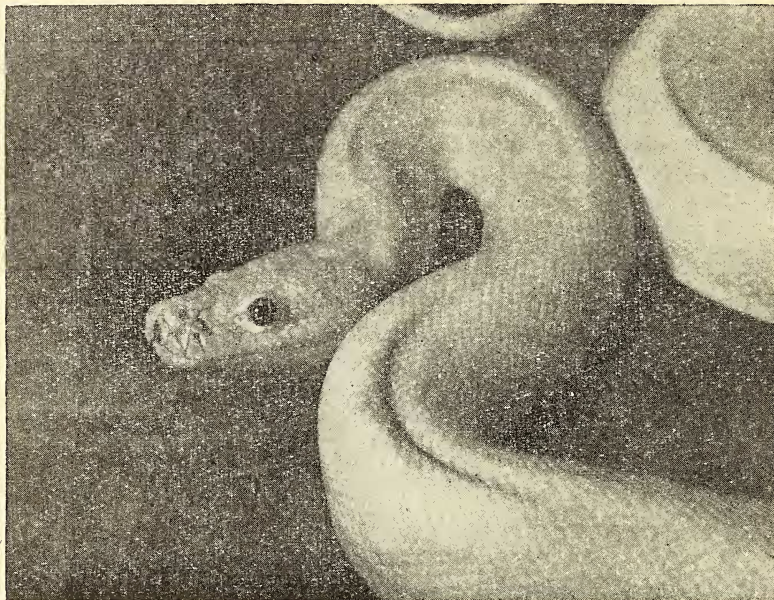


From the characteristics of its scales, it appeared to be a Rock Python, *Python molurus*.



The dealer reported that the reptile had thrice shed its skin at his place and no change in colour was observed during the period.

It is being force-fed on meat, fish such as *Ophicephalus punctatus* etc. by an outside snakeman once a week and is thriving well. It is, however, seen that the growth is rather slow and the snake looks somewhat emaciated.

A foreign animal dealer who has recently purchased the specimen checked feeding by offering live white rats and red munias. The snake very greedily caught and devoured two white rats and three munias.

The exact locality of procurement could not be ascertained, but it is stated to have been secured through a village snakeman from the hill tract north of Jalpaiguri.

I am unable to trace any record of a similar freak in Python in the standard books.

ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS, ALIPORE,
CALCUTTA 27,
June 6, 1955.

R. K. LAHIRI

16. ON THE ALLOCATION OF THE NAME *COLUBER* *PLATURINUS* SHAW

Recently while preparing a paper dealing with the subspecies of *Lycodon subcinctus* Boie (1827, *Isis*, 20, p. 551), my attention was drawn to the reference in Duméril, Bibron and Duméril (1854, *Erp.*

Gen., 7, p. 598) in which they place the name *Coluber platurinus* Shaw (1802, Gen. Zool., 3, (2), p. 468) as a questioned synonym of *Ophites* (= *Lycodon*) *subcinctus*.

On checking the literature it was further determined that Cantor (1847, *Jour. Asiatic Soc. Bengal*, 16, (2), p. 916) had suppressed the name *subcinctus* in favour of Shaw's terminology. Günther (1864, Rept. Brit. India, p. 322), however, placed Shaw's name in the synonymy of *subcinctus*, stating in a footnote, 'As it was impossible to recognize this species from Shaw's description, the name proposed by him has no claim to priority.' Subsequently Boulenger (1893, Cat. Snakes Brit. Mus., 1, p. 359) placed *Lycodon platurinus* Cantor (not Shaw) in the synonymy of *subcinctus*, and completely neglected to indicate what was to be done with Shaw's name. Recent authors (e.g., de Rooij, Rept. Indo-Aust. Arch., 1917, vol. 2; Taylor, Snakes Philip. Ids., 1922; Pope, Rept. China, 1935; Smith, F.B.I., 1943, vol. 3) have not even mentioned the name *platurinus*, either of Shaw or of Cantor, in their synonymies.

An examination of Shaw's description leads one to the conclusion that it would be impossible for his name to be applied to any species of *Lycodon*, and it becomes quite evident that Shaw and Cantor were not speaking of the same snake.

A careful examination of this problem has led to the conclusion that *Coluber platurinus* Shaw was undoubtedly based upon a specimen of snake referable to the genus *Bungarus*. The description of *C. platurinus* as given by Shaw (*op. cit.*) is as follows: '... back slightly carinated, sides somewhat sloping, and abdomen flattish: colour of the whole animal an equal variegation of broad blackish-brown and white bands, equidistant from each other, and entirely surrounding the respective parts: the white bands are spotted with black: head rather large than small, covered with large scales of a black-brown colour elegantly separated from each other by intervening white spaces, so that the head appears marked with large black spots on a white background: nose abrupt or truncated: tail very long, slender and gradually tapering to the extremity: length of the whole animal about three feet and a half: scales of moderate size, ovate, and not carinated.' (No scale counts are given!)

Certainly from the information given in this description (note particularly the statements in spaced type which present what I believe are the most critical points of the description) there can be little doubt but that Shaw was describing one of the kraits (genus *Bungarus*) and most definitely not a *Lycodon*. Furthermore, from the nature of the coloration, e.g. 'the broad black and white bands, equidistant from each other, and entirely surrounding the respective parts; ... head appears marked with large black spots on a white background,' and so forth, it seems highly probable that he was examining a specimen of *Bungarus fasciatus* (Schneider, 1801), the so-called 'banded krait' (see Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 416, for comparison of description); his reference to Seba's plate (2, t. 83, fig. 2), which he questions anyhow (note question mark immediately following reference), possibly resulted from the great similarity in dorsal coloration of his specimen to Seba's figure (probably *L. subcinctus*, *fide* Cantor, *op. cit.*).

Thus, it is believed that *Coluber platurinus* Shaw should be considered a synonym of *Bungarus fasciatus* (Schneider); *Lycodon platurinus* Cantor must be placed in the synonymy of *Lycodon subcinctus subcinctus* Boie.

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ALAN E. LEVITON

17. FISHERIES OF CERTAIN TROPICAL FISHES IN NATURAL COLD WATERS OF INDIA¹

During a recent zoological survey of the Kashmir Valley (May-June, 1954), the wide occurrence of the Central American Poeciliid Mosquito-control Fish, *Gambusia* (*Schizophallus*) *holbrookii* Girard (Original home: Atlantic Coast drainage from New Jersey to Florida and adjoining gulf drainage), attracted our early attention as the fishermen showed curiosity in having a fish which gave birth to young ones instead of liberating eggs as all other fishes found in the Kashmir Valley do. Such a curiosity was, however, felt in the U.S.A. also when the fish was introduced there for the first time. Innes (1944, p. 311) writes:

'To many aquarists, at least in the United States *Gambusia affinis* represents the beginning of an epoch. It was our first live-bearer. The species was advertised by dealers as the eighth wonder of the world. All flocked with their \$ 2 per pair to prove or disprove for themselves the claims for this strange fish.'

Mr. G. M. Malik of the S.P. College, Srinagar, who has considerable acquaintance with the fish fauna of the Valley, had not seen or heard of it when he was in charge of the Game and Fish Service of the Kashmir State. The fishermen had observed this fish in natural waters only a couple of years ago and now keep living specimens in earthen pots to verify for themselves and to show to others the birth of young fish from pregnant females.

No record of the introduction of *Gambusia* in the Valley could be obtained. Specimens were collected from the Dal Lake (Dal Ghat, Srinagar; Nishat Garden Ghat; Tel-bal stream and adjoining portion of Dal Lake), Wooller Lake at Ningle; Manasbal Lake; and from paddy fields about 7 miles from Srinagar on the way to Tangmarg. Whoever may have taken the fish to the Kashmir Valley, either as an aquarium fish or for public health purposes, *Gambusia* is now firmly established in the natural waters of the Kashmir Valley.

As a larvicidal fish, it is reputedly very efficient and 'its practical value is enhanced because it can live in good or bad water, and will stand a temperature range from 40 to 100 degrees' (Innes, loc. cit.).

¹ Read at the 42nd Session of the Indian Science Congress held at Baroda in January 1955.